

ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES ON A FLYING TRIP  
THROUGH KANSAS, NEW MEXICO,  
ARIZONA AND TEXAS.

BY HENRY K. COALE.

HAVING occasion to visit a number of United States Army Posts in the Southwest, I left Chicago March 15, 1890, taking along a collecting outfit, although the trip was made with another object in view. The present paper does not pretend to be a list of the birds inhabiting the localities visited, being simply a record of such observations as came under the writer's notice during the few hours spent in collecting specimens in the vicinity of the Military Posts.

It was with pleasant anticipations that the trip was begun, which was to carry me into new fields and among the many (to me) rare birds that I had only before read of in books, or seen in collections. The day I left Chicago Canada Geese and Herring Gulls were flying over in a northwesterly direction. In passing through Missouri flocks of Blackbirds, Juncos, Horned Larks and other early spring migrants were seen in the fields along the road. The weather was perfect, except where otherwise noted.

*Fort Leavenworth, Kan.*, March 16, 1892. On a bluff overlooking the Missouri River. In the great elms that surround the parade ground numbers of Bluebirds, Baltimore Orioles and Robins were singing their glad songs to the awakening of spring. Meadowlarks, Goldfinches and Downy Woodpeckers were plentiful about the Post.

*Fort Riley, Kan.*, March 18. On the U. P. R. R., northeast of the center of the State, on the Smokey River. Spent a few hours in the bottomlands across the river, where a luxuriant growth of trees and bushes afforded shelter for troops of Cardinal Grosbeaks, Slate-colored Juncos, Fox and Song Sparrows, Black-capped Titmice, Vireos and other familiar birds. A small flock of *Zonotrichia querula* was feeding in the tops of some bushes. A shot brought down a male and female; the rest flew away and were not again met with.

*Fort Logan, Colo.,* March 20. Seven miles from Denver. A barren sand desert, with a scant growth of trees along Clear Creek. Birds were exceedingly scarce, a ride of ten miles with Mr. H. G. Smith, Jr., a local collector, revealing less than a dozen birds, except Black-billed Magpies, which were common. *Melospiza fasciata montana*, *Junco annectens* and *Merula migratoria propinqua* were the only species secured. The English Sparrow of the eastern cities is replaced in Denver by the House Finch, which builds its nest under cornices of the big down town stores. It perches on the office window sills and sings prettily. It was found to be common at nearly all the frontier posts, building under the low roofs of the verandas, on any suitable projection.

*Fort Union, N. M.,* March 22. On a level plain ten miles from Watrous. About a mile back of the post is the old abandoned Arsenal which was Kit Carson's headquarters during the war. His house and garden are now in a very dilapidated condition. *Pipilo fuscus mesoleucus* was hopping about on the roof; *Sayornis saya* flew in and out of the vacant parlors; *Junco annectens* rambled among the weeds in the garden; while *Sialia arctica* warbled its pleasing notes in the trees surrounding the house. Among the rocks behind the Arsenal, *Juncos*, *Pipilos* and Western Robins were seen. The Cañon Towhee frequents the back yards of the officers' quarters, and may be seen perched on the shed or fence, allowing one to pass within a few feet without taking flight. In the post garden I noticed a curious trick of the Mountain Bluebird. Toward dusk they repaired to a piece of plowed ground in search of their evening meal, hopping among the overturned sods in pursuit of insects or worms. Every few minutes some male would utter his spring song, then rising in the air would flutter in one spot about ten feet above the ground, moving its wings with great rapidity for a minute or two, when it would join its companions on the ground. In a bush near the garden I shot a beautiful male *Pipilo maculatus megalonyx*, and on the open plain a pair of *Rhynchophanes mccowni*. A few birds were foraging among the refuse back of the corral. A number of flocks passing over saw them and alighted on the ground. These were joined by others until a space of several hundred feet was literally covered with them.

They all headed in one direction, feeding and constantly moving forward. A shot at long range brought down six or seven *Otocoris alpestris arenicola*, and only disturbed a few of those nearest. The vast army of hundreds of Horned Larks paid little attention to me as I picked up the dead ones. They moved on, surrounding me on all sides, the nearest being not more than a hundred feet off. They were twittering merrily, and now and then some bright plumaged male would indulge in a song, or engage in a set-to with some rival. Suddenly four strange birds, attracted by the moving troops of Larks, dropped among them, their black breasts easily distinguishing them from the others. They proved to be Chestnut-collared Buntings (*Calcaeus ornatus*), and as each fell a number of the Larks shared its fate. No others were met with.

*Fort Marcy, N. M.*, March 25. The post is surrounded by the old Mexican town of Santa Fé. Near the fort is a deep cañon with plenty of trees, and a tiny brook trickling among the rocks. A Horned Owl that I had not noticed sailed out of a big tree as I passed and was soon out of sight over the hill. Several *Myadestes townsendi* were perched on the tops of tall bushes at the entrance to the cañon. Three species of Junco were secured: *J. hyemalis*, *caniceps* and *annectens*. The only other birds observed were the Mountain Bluebird and Long-crested Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri macrolopha*).

*Whipple Barracks, Ariz.*, March 31. Elevation 6500 feet. One mile from Prescott. My host was Captain W. L. Carpenter, an ardent student of nature. This was the only point where inclement weather made collecting disagreeable. The snow was an inch deep and still falling when we went out among the rocky, pine-clad hills along the creek. Very few birds were seen. In a small tree a tiny bird was hopping among the branches, which proved to be Lucy's Warbler (*Helminthophila luciae*), an adult male. *Junco hyemalis thurberi* sought shelter from the storm in a scrub evergreen.

*Fort Verde, Ariz.*, April 2. Elevation 4500 feet; forty-five miles from Whipple Barracks. Winter there, summer here. The clean sandy bottomland of the Verde River, with its abundant growth of huge cottonwood trees in full leaf, formed a paradise for birds, situated as it is among the moun-

tains at the mouth of the grand Copper Cañon. Numerous low sand-hills covered with bushes offered convenient shelter for little parties of Gambel's Quail, which were constantly flushed and ran ahead as I walked along the river bank. In the cottonwoods birds were as plentiful as in the woods of Illinois during the migration. *Dendroica æstiva sonorana* and *D. auduboni* were abundant. Several of the delicate little Lucy's Warblers were taken. Their peculiar song is easily recognized when once heard. Crimson-fronted House Finches, Vesper Sparrows, Western Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows, Lincoln's Finches and Cañon Towhees were on every hand. Black Pewees, Rough-winged Swallows, and White-throated Wrens were also secured. There being no grass, every bird shot fell on the clean sand and was easily found. The most striking bird of the Verde Valley is the Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus*), its brilliant plumage and flaring crest being seen at quite a distance among the green foliage. A specimen of the Rock Wren was shot in the brush. *Pipilo aberti* lurked in the darkest bush clumps, his loud *chuck* leading to the capture of several specimens. *Amphispiza bilineata* frequented the weeds about the fences, as did the Arizona Goldfinches and Western White-crowned Sparrows. An hour or two in the morning would furnish all the birds I could prepare by midnight, and it was with great reluctance that I left this beautiful spot on the Verde.

On the way back to Whipple I found the nest and eggs of the Lead-colored Bush-Tit (*Psaltriparus plumbeus*) and shot the male bird. The nest, shaped like a purse, is eight inches long and three and three-quarters inches in diameter (a large structure for such a tiny bird), and was suspended from a bush four feet from the ground, close to the road. There is an opening about the size of a silver quarter on one side near the top. The walls of the nest are nearly an inch thick and very soft, covered with a wonderful collection of fine leaves, catkins, feathers, and tufted seeds, besides other materials difficult to describe, the whole presenting a beautiful example of bird architecture. The bottom is lined with a soft bed of downy feathers, on which reposed five pure white eggs, averaging .52 x .37 inches, and perfectly fresh. I believe this is the second description of the nesting of *Psaltri-*

*parus plumbeus*. (See Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., 1887, p. 557, for first record.)

*Fort Mojave, Ariz.*, April 6. Situated on the Colorado River, seventeen miles north of The Needles, in a desert with its thorn bearing mesquit and other bushes. The Mojave Apaches are camped about two miles above the post in the river bottom. They are peaceable and some of the officers hire them to act as 'strikers' or servants in their houses. They wear no clothes except a piece of cloth around the loins. The women and older girls wear a short calico dress. Birds were not very plentiful. The place is one of the hottest in the United States, the thermometer ranging from 100° to 120° F. in the shade. *Auriparus flaviceps* had just completed its nest in a mesquit. Troops of *Zonotrichia leucophrys intermedia* were everywhere, and *Troglodytes aëdon aztecus* was not uncommon. A Curved-billed Thrasher (*Harporhynchus palmeri*?) was seen. Here again Lucy's Warblers, Brewer's Sparrows, and Cañon Towhees were taken, and on the road to The Needles I saw several of the black-crested *Phainopepla nitens*.

*San Diego Barracks, Cal.*, April 12. In the southwestern corner of the United States, in the city of San Diego. A few birds were collected—*Amphispiza belli*, *Otocoris alpestris rubea*, *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambeli*, and *Tyrannus vociferus*. None of these were met with elsewhere.

*Fort Lowell, Ariz.*, April 14. Nine miles from Tucson, where I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Herbert Brown and inspecting his fine collection of Arizona birds. On the mesa, a barren waste between Fort Lowell and Tucson, is the favorite breeding place of Palmer's and Bendire's Thrashers. Their nests are placed in a cactus, each species seeming to select a different kind to build in. Specimens of each were taken: adults, half grown young of first brood, and fresh laid eggs. The full complement is three.

Dr. Elliott Coues gives an interesting account of the habits of the Thrashers inhabiting this particular locality in his 'Birds of the Colorado Valley.' The most abundant species noted was the Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*). These birds were on the ground in immense flocks, thousands I should judge, and were quite hard to approach. They kept running and flying

over each other, always keeping well ahead of me. Several were collected, but only a few in black plumage. At Fort Lowell the verandas of the officers' quarters are screened by rows of tall, thin cactus stalks which put out leaves in summer, making a compact wall. It is the custom to sleep out doors during most of the summer on the wide verandas, protected by this natural barrier.

*Fort Huachuca, Ariz., April 18.* The fort is at the mouth of a great cañon. Live oaks are growing everywhere in the post, and cottonwoods along the creek. The California Woodpecker is the familiar bird about the trees in the officers' gardens. Brewer's Blackbirds, California Jays and White-necked Ravens are common. Found a Road-runner's nest and five eggs nearly ready to hatch in a live oak, about six feet from the ground. Along the creek I secured a pair of Green Towhees (*Pipilo chlorurus*), not elsewhere met with. Also several Vermilion Flycatchers, White-rumped Shrikes, Western Bewick's Wrens and Black-capped Flycatching Warblers, Cañon Towhees, House Finches, one *Ceryle alcyon*, and a number of Arizona Jays (*Aphelocoma sieberii arizonæ*), the last two in Tanner's Cañon. Huachuca is the only place where I saw the 'sand whirls,' a solid column of sand which is lifted from the earth to the sky by the wind, having the appearance of a water-spout, which the reader may remember seeing pictured in his old geography.

*Fort Grant, Ariz., April 22.* Grant is twenty-seven miles from Willcox, Ariz. A creek with cottonwoods and underbrush affords an inviting place for collecting specimens. A hundred feet either side was the desert, with its cacti extending as far as the eye could reach. The first bird shot was *Mimus polyglottos*. No others seen. The most abundant species is the Mourning Dove. This bird flew up at every step. Another common species, not seen elsewhere, was *Icterus cucullatus nelsoni*. It frequented the tops of the cottonwoods and came about the officers' quarters, showing very little fear of man. *Helminthophila celata lutescens*, one female taken; also *Vireo solitarius cassini*. In a low bush I found a nest of *Pipilo fuscus mesoleucus* containing three fresh eggs. Also in a cactus, a nest and five eggs of the Cactus Wren, which was quite common on the mesa. One

nest contained five dried up little Wrens and the dead body of the parent resting upon them. This Wren has a habit of standing on top of the nest (which is a bulky affair usually in plain sight), and attracting one's attention by her notes. In another cactus was the nest and six fresh eggs of the White-rumped Shrike. The Western Yellow and Audubon's Warblers were quite common. A single *Peuceea ruficeps boucardi* was shot.

*Fort Thomas, Ariz.*, forty-five miles north of Grant, on the Gila River. I reached there after dark on the 25th of April. Early the next morning I was up and out. About half way across the parade ground was a solitary tree, which had the appearance of being loaded down with oranges. There was a tremendous chattering going on in that direction, sounding strangely familiar, but not until a dozen or more Yellow-headed Blackbirds dropped to the ground and began hopping about did I realize that the supposed oranges were the heads and throats of these handsome birds. Going into the house I got Lieut. R. D. Read to take a shot at them. He had to fire at long range. Thirteen were killed about the tree, and as the great flock rose and flew toward the corral several more were seen to drop; and the tree—it was a dead one, with not a single leaf on it. It was the custom of hundreds of these birds to perch in this tree every morning about sunrise and utter their loud notes. Around the corral the Brewer's Blackbirds were seen in large numbers and as tame as barn yard fowls. The same afternoon I went up the river thirty-three miles in a buckboard to

*San Carlos, Ariz.*, one hundred and five miles from the railroad. On both sides of the river the San Carlos Apaches have their 'wickiups' or brush huts. There are thousands of these Indians and though generally peaceable, a number of renegades were out at this time, so that bird collecting was dangerous to attempt. At San Carlos the troops live in tents covered with brush (thermometer 100° to 120° in the shade). At sundown thousands of Yellow-headed Blackbirds came into camp and roosted on the brush on top of the tents. They were very tame here and seemed to know that no shooting was allowed. Saw many Road-runners in the brush along the road, and near Fort Grant shot a pair of Blue Quail (*Callipepla squamata*), a bird that frequented the desert where Cactus was the only vegetation.

*Fort Davis, Texas, May 1.* The fort is prettily located at the foot of some giant boulders that seem to have been thrown in a heap some two hundred feet high. Panthers, Mexicans, goats and Rock Wrens are about the only living things in the rocks. In hunting for one of the latter I got close enough to one of the former to see his glaring eyes in a dark cavern in the rocks. Here I was reminded that I was nearing my native hunting grounds by finding *Helmitherus vermivorus*, *Anthus pensilvanicus*, and *Chelidon erythrogaster*, and added to my collection specimens of *Speotyto cunicularia hypogaea*, *Passerina amana*, *Sphyrapicus varius nuchalis*, *Pyrranga rubra cooperi*, and *Salpinctes obsoletus*.

*Fort Clark, Texas, April 5.* Ten miles north of Spofford Junction. Luxuriant growth of large and small trees, bushes and peculiar plants. One of the typical birds of this place is the Nonpareil (*Passerina ciris*). It sings from the top of a bush in the open woods. Cardinals, Lark Finches, Mockingbirds, Cooper's Tanager and other species were abundant. Capt. Vinton, of the post, told me of his seeing a flock of green Parrots with yellow heads at Fort Gibson, Ind. Terr., in 1886. They lit in a grove near the post and staid fully twenty minutes. No shot gun being handy they were not molested.

Stopped long enough in San Antonia, Texas, to see the principal streets. Noticed *Chondestes grammacus strigata* hopping about under the horses and wagons like 'our own' English Sparrow. A little out of the city saw several *Milvulus forficatus* on the telegraph wires, and at the rifle range ten miles out, they were flying about over the shooters' heads.

After a very pleasant trip, briefly outlined above, I reached Chicago May 10, to find it chilly and raining. The migration being late I had the pleasure of collecting a nice series of desirable birds during the month, among them *Turdus fuscescens salicicola* at Ravenia, Lake Co., Ill.

Here the writer would express his gratitude and appreciation of the many courtesies extended by the officers of the Army with whom he came in contact, having been taken into their homes and treated like a brother, although a comparative stranger to most of them.